

# Seven Steps to School Success



A little support from home can go a long way toward helping your child succeed in school. From creating simple, everyday routines to staying in touch with teachers, here are seven ways you can help your youngster do his best.

**1 Keep up healthy routines.** Your child's eating, sleeping, exercise, and TV habits can affect her performance in school. Send her off ready to learn with these suggestions:

- Starting the day with breakfast can help your youngster concentrate, behave better, and learn more in school. A balanced morning meal includes protein (eggs, milk), whole grains (bagel, cereal), and a fruit or vegetable (banana, tomato slices).
- An hour of physical activity a day will help keep your child healthy and energetic. Encourage her to do something active each day (play outside, dance to music). *Tip:* Too much TV can keep your youngster from getting enough exercise. Experts suggest limiting screen time—TV, computers, video games—to an hour a day.
- Children need 10–11 hours of sleep each night to stay alert in school. Have your youngster stick to quiet activities after dinner (homework, board games, coloring), and create a regular bedtime routine (bath, story) so she'll fall asleep more easily.

**2 Stay in touch with teachers.** Regular communication with your child's school can keep you up-to-date on his progress. It also shows him that you and his teacher are a team. Here are some ideas for staying connected:

- Check in with the teacher from time to time—with either a call, a note, or an e-mail. She'll appreciate hearing from you when things are going smoothly as well as when you have a concern. For example, you might let her know about a lesson that your youngster enjoyed ("Aidan liked the magnet experiment so much that he showed it to his little sister").



- If your youngster needs extra support with a subject, let his teacher know you want to do your part ("What can we do at home to help Simon learn decimals?"). Your participation can encourage your child and help solve problems faster.
- Volunteer in your youngster's classroom or from home. If you can visit during the school day, the teacher may ask you to decorate bulletin boards or help children select library books, for example. If you work or have younger children at home, you might ask if your child can bring a project home for you, such as putting together a class book or framing student artwork.

**3 Develop a homework habit.** Routines provide consistency and let youngsters know what they're expected to do. Here are ways you can work with your child to create a homework routine:

- Many children need to burn off energy after school. You might set a timer for 30 minutes while your youngster plays. When it goes off, she'll know it's homework time. If you have more than one child, encourage siblings to do homework at the same time. They can motivate and help each other—and there will be fewer distractions.
- Remind your youngster to gather supplies and materials (paper, pencil, ruler, books, dictionary) before she sits down to work. That way, she won't need to get back up to search for items she needs.
- Begin homework sessions by asking your child to explain her assignments. When she's finished, be sure they're complete, but avoid correcting mistakes—homework shows her teacher what she has mastered and what she still needs to work on. *Note:* If you're not there when your youngster does her homework, let her know you'll look it over when you get home.



**4 Show interest in your child's work.** Spend time talking to your youngster about school every day. She'll see that you care about what she does in class, and you'll know what she's learning. Consider these suggestions:

- When you ask your child about her day, phrase questions so they require more than a "yes" or "no" answer. She'll share more information if you ask, "What happened during your presentation today?" rather than "Was your presentation good?"
- Go through your youngster's backpack together each day, and ask about papers that she brings home ("Who was Booker T. Washington?"). Give specific praise, such as "You included a lot of information!" Your child will listen to what you have to say and be more likely to keep up the good work.
- Attend school events like your youngster's class play, science fair, or spelling bee. While you're there, ask her to show you any of her work that's displayed in the halls or in her classroom. She'll be proud to share her school life with you.



**5 Read, read, read.** Reading builds skills in every subject. Here are suggestions for motivating your child to read more and to understand what he reads:

- Keep reading material handy so your youngster can pick it up anytime. Have books, magazines, and newspapers on shelves or in baskets around the house. *Tip:* On holidays and birthdays, expand your child's collection by suggesting that relatives give him books, magazine subscriptions, or bookstore gift cards.



● Improve your youngster's reading comprehension by discussing books that you read together. For example, you might compare one story to another or to your own experiences.

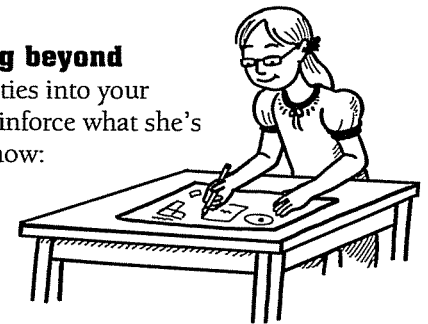
● Help your child figure out unfamiliar words. You can suggest that he sound them out or use other words in the sentence or paragraph to make a good guess. For example, if he stumbles on the word *buttoned* in the sentence "Claire buttoned her coat before going outside," he might think, "What would she do to a coat that starts with *b*?"

**6 Strengthen study skills.** Developing good study habits in elementary school will help your youngster succeed now and later. These strategies can help him do his best on quizzes and tests:

- Help him figure out his learning style. If he's a visual learner (he prefers to look at words and pictures), he might make flash cards to memorize math facts. Or perhaps he is an auditory learner (he'd rather hear information). Suggest that he recite facts into a tape recorder and play them back. And if he is a kinesthetic learner (he likes to move around while studying), try quizzing him while he's jumping rope or bouncing a basketball.
- Compare note taking to a treasure hunt. Tell your child to search for important nuggets of information. Names, dates, and words in bold print are usually worth jotting down, along with an explanation of why each one matters.
- Teach your youngster to pace himself when preparing for a test. Say he has a social studies quiz on Friday. He might build 15 minutes a day, Monday through Thursday, into his homework routine. That way, he'll avoid cramming on Thursday evening.

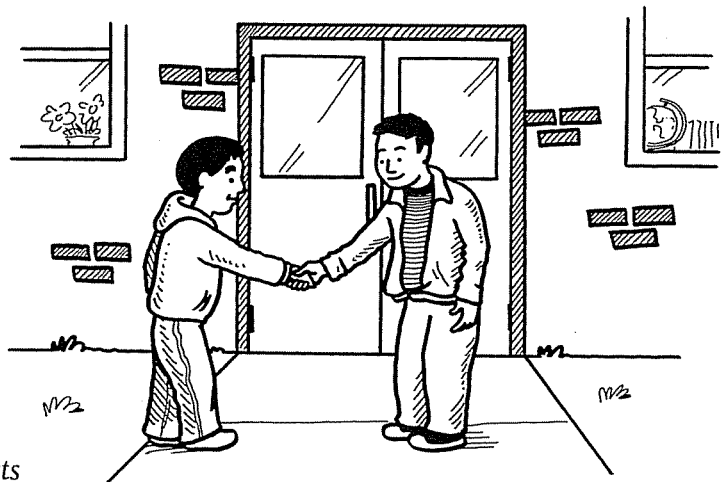
**7 Extend learning beyond school.** Fit activities into your child's day that reinforce what she's learning in class. Here's how:

- Give her practical jobs that will help her practice school skills. When she studies maps, for example, have her draw a map of a room in your house with new furniture arrangements you could try. To help her learn about money, she might collect your family's spare change and count it once a week.
- Fit learning into everyday activities such as cooking. Your youngster can measure ingredients to practice fractions. Ask, "How much flour would we need if we doubled this muffin recipe?" When she studies the water cycle, ask her to make ice cubes, or show her the steam when you boil water. Explain that water turns into a solid (ice) when it freezes and into a gas (steam) when it's heated.
- On weekends, plan family outings that relate to school subjects. During a Civil War unit, you might visit a battlefield. Read the historic markers, and suggest that your child pick up a brochure to share in class. Or find out if a school or community theater group is putting on a play based on a story she has read in school.



## Home & School CONNECTION

# Learning to Resolve Conflicts



Students who get along with others and feel safe at school are more likely to do well in class. And while classmates won't always see eye-to-eye, learning to resolve conflicts can build life skills such as communicating, compromising, and dealing with angry feelings. Here are ways to help your child handle everyday disagreements and more serious situations, including bullying and cyberbullying.

**Practice listening skills.** When children really listen to one another, misunderstandings can often be prevented. Play the "parrot game" to show your youngster how easy it is to forget what someone said.



First, ask him to tell you about his day. Try to repeat word for word what he said. When you finish, ask him to point out details that you missed. Switch roles, and describe your day for him to repeat. Then, explain that people can get into arguments when

one person misunderstands or forgets what the other says.

Suggest that your child remember the parrot game when he and a friend are talking about something that could lead to an argument. He can repeat what he thinks he heard: "You said you are going first this time, and I get to go first next time, right?" He'll learn to communicate clearly and avoid some arguments.

**Draw a "do-over."** Picturing a different ending to a disagreement with a friend can help your youngster handle similar situations in the future.

Ask her to draw what happened, and have her describe the picture. You might ask, "What are you and your friend doing? How are you feeling?" ("She's saying I cheated at Monopoly. I feel mad.") Then, help her make another drawing that shows how she and her friend solved the problem. Ask, "What are you doing differently in this picture? How do you feel here?" ("We both agree to take our last turn over. We feel happy.")

The next time your child sees her friend, encourage her to share her pictures. Your child might say, "I like the second one much better. Let's try that the next time we argue."

**Write about it.** Sometimes when people get upset, they struggle to find the right words. When your youngster argues with a friend, encourage her to take a break until she knows what to say. She could tell her friend, "I need a few minutes to calm down. Let's talk later," and walk away.

Suggest that she write on one side of an index card why she is upset ("Jen won't let me have a turn on the computer") and why she thinks her friend is upset ("She doesn't want to stop playing online Scrabble"). On the other side, she can write down ideas for how they could both feel better ("use a timer," "find something else to do together").



Writing will help your youngster cool off. And when she and her friend have a problem in the future, she'll have ideas for resolving it.

**Show empathy.** Teach your child to look at a situation from the other person's point of view. Understanding a friend's feelings can soften your youngster's hurt or anger.

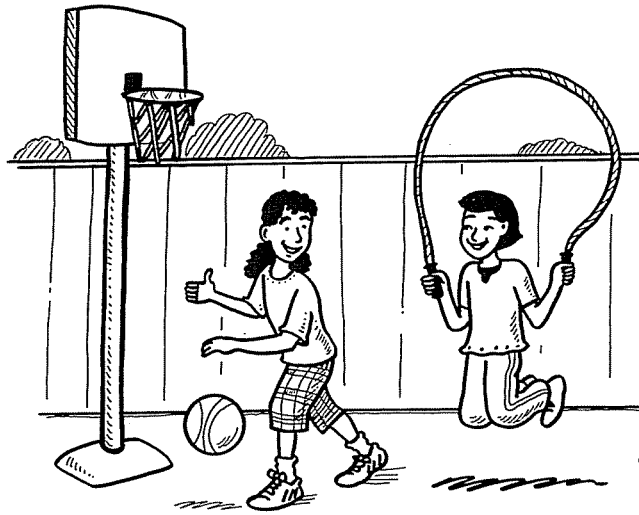
Role-play a situation in which he is upset but reacts to a friend with empathy. For instance, maybe he shared the news of a good test grade with his friend, who responded, "So what?" Your child's feelings will probably be hurt, but looking for the reason behind his friend's words may help. He might say, "You seem upset this afternoon," and his friend may confess that he got a low grade on the test. Then, your youngster could suggest that they study together next time.

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Also, work with your child to develop a list of ways to respond when a friend upsets him. (“I’m sorry you feel that way,” or, “Can you explain why you said that?”)

**Agree to disagree.** Your youngster may be surprised to learn that it’s okay if she and her friends don’t always agree. In fact, different opinions are part of what makes each person unique.

Say your child’s best friend is upset that they rarely play together at recess. Your youngster prefers to shoot



baskets while her friend would rather jump rope. Suggest that she say, “I love doing things together that we both enjoy. But I really look forward to basketball. Let’s be partners in science lab later, okay?”  
 Remind her that feelings aren’t right or wrong, so the goal is to figure out what the problem is and come up with a plan to make everyone feel better.

## Handling bullying

Even children with good conflict-resolution skills might struggle with bullies. That’s because your youngster is unlikely to be able to reason or compromise with a bully—and he shouldn’t try. Help stop bullying with these suggestions.



**1. Take bullying seriously.** If your child tells you that he is being bullied, talk to him about what happened and who was involved. Make it clear that keeping himself safe by asking for help is *never* tattling. Offer to talk to his teacher or school counselor, but don’t insist on doing so (unless you feel your youngster is in danger).

**2. Work on strategies.** Pretend to be the bully, and help your youngster practice different ways to handle the situation. For instance, he might simply shrug and walk away. Suggest that he show confidence by making eye contact with the bully and keeping his head held high. The two of you can also come up with things your child can say that will show the bully he isn’t intimidated (for example, he can matter-of-factly say, “I really don’t care”). *Note:* He should keep in mind that the bully wants a reaction and may get angry when he doesn’t get the one he hoped for. To stay safe, your child should walk toward an adult or a group of friends.

**3. Build self-confidence.** Children who feel good about themselves and have friends tend to have fewer problems with bullies. Self-esteem is especially important if your youngster is being excluded from a group—a common form of bullying. Ask your child what he likes about himself. Maybe he’s

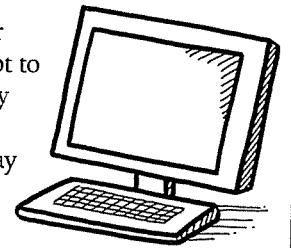
good at playing chess, for example. You might look for a chess club where he can meet others who share his interest.

*Note:* Your youngster may not tell you when he is being bullied, so look for signs. He might become quiet and anxious, try to stay home from school, or avoid spending time with classmates. Keep talking to him, and let him know that you are always willing to help if something is bothering him.

## Cyberbullying

Cyberbullies use computers to threaten or harass others. Here is how your youngster can handle cyberbullies—and avoid being one herself:

- Teach your youngster Internet safety rules. If she uses instant messaging, she should not open IMs from people she doesn’t know. She should never share personal information (name, address, school name) with strangers. If a classmate sends her a threatening IM, she needs to tell you right away and then block the sender. And if she sees a threatening or an embarrassing post on an online bulletin board, she should have you help her report the user to the board’s moderator.
- Discuss online manners with your child. For instance, it’s important not to type anything that she would not say in person. If she’s talking to a friend and they start arguing, she should say good-bye and log off. It’s better to solve problems in person, since typed words can sometimes be misinterpreted. And she should never post mean statements or private information about a classmate online. Remind her that once she types something, she can’t take it back.



*Tip:* To learn more, your youngster can take the Web safety quiz at [www.stopcyberbullying.org](http://www.stopcyberbullying.org).

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